

AB Auds & Arenas

BOMI PANELISTS TOLD...

Differences In Statutes Make Prosecution Of Scalpers Difficult

By LINDA DECKARD

LAS VEGAS — Regulatory statutes are generally all that restrict the operations of ticket scalpers in the U.S., and they vary locally.

Discussing ticket scalping during a panel at the Box Office Management International (BOMI) convention here Jan. 26-29, Jim O'Connell, director of public assembly facilities for Arizona State University, Tempe, and James O'Neil, attorney, Ryley, Carlock & Applewhite, reviewed the history and current status of scalping.

O'Neil noted the scalping laws are "often very limited — to sale on public property or at athletic events only. The scalpers' lobby is quite successful at preventing or limiting legislation."

There have been some creative answers, however. Reviewing suggestions from the audience or ones he'd heard of, O'Neil noted the Dallas Mavericks have simply told "teens and winos in the front of the line to go to the end." On the local level, one can remember that

"tickets are nothing more than a revokable license. You can place any limits you want to. Refusal to sell has been upheld, as long as it's publicized."

Sales taxes can curtail some scalpers: a resale exemption certificate can be required and a scalper without the exemption is subject to a tax on the markup, possibly on the gross sale. "The Tucson (Ariz.) Community Center got a scalper arrested because he didn't have a sales tax license," O'Neil reported.

In New Jersey, ticket brokers and scalpers banded together to get a state statute thrown out on the basis it was a "monopoly or conspiracy to fix prices," O'Neil warned. He also referred to a tie-in case against the Omni, Atlanta, and to the "most recent case, filed last month, by the San Jose Box Office, which basically alleges a monopolization by some of the facility owners. Pleadings are being filed."

While Alabama has no criminal law limiting scalpers, there is a

\$100 tax imposed, O'Neil said. "One Midwestern state allows buyers to sue scalpers for \$100 for every ticket purchased."

VARIANCE IN PENALTIES

Penalties, state to state, range from a misdemeanor to a \$1,000 fine. "In New England, the second conviction is actually a felony... In other countries — England, Australia and New Zealand for example — it's criminal. Russia is cracking down on the black market."

"Scalpers do a better job of serving customers than we sometimes do," O'Connell began. They buy low and sell high, which is pure capitalism. "But they also hassle our patrons, deprive the casual fan of the best seats, hassle and abuse our sales staff, and create complaints we have to answer. They inflate ticket prices beyond my ability to compensate the patron."

It is "myth to say we are underpricing our tickets. Our job is to

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Philadelphia's Veterans Stadium Getting \$3 Million Renovation

ORANGE, Calif. — A new lighting system which will reduce the number of lamps by 1,000 at Veterans Stadium, Philadelphia, should help the utility bill this next season. The new system features 1500-watt metal halide lamps.

Ron Bond, right, stadium manager, and Greg Grillone, left, assistant stadium manager, told AB it will take four years to pay for the new lights. They are seen here talking to Melvin Miller, Legion Field, Birmingham, Ala., at the stadium managers seminar.

Veterans Stadium improvements, budgeted at \$3 million, also include installation of a new AstroTurf valued at \$2 million. The new turf has vertical drainage. It replaces a six-year-old artificial turf. Featured will be a recessible pitcher's mound for speedy conversion.

In addition, a landscaping project around the exterior of the stadium is budgeted at \$250,000. The Phillies are also investing in some renovation, Bond said. Work is to be completed by March 31 in preparation for the Phils' April 5 home opener. (AB Photo)

Wrestling's Popularity Boosts Biz For Raskin's USWA Troupe

By LISA ZHITO

Bob Raskin of Raskin Sports Productions is riding the crest of a wave — the resurgent popularity of professional wrestling.

Raskin has notched 20 years as a promoter of sporting events, but for the past six he has devoted himself to professional wrestling. His latest endeavor is the United States Wrestling Alliance (USWA), an "independent wrestling promotion" based in Union, N.J.

The larger wrestling organizations, such as Titan Sports' World Wrestling Federation (WWF), are what he termed the "Rolls Royce of the industry. You've got to give Titan Sports credit — they've done a lot of innovations," such as

the first prime-time network television coverage of a wrestling event in more than 30 years, which aired Feb. 5 on NBC.

Mostly what these wrestling giants have done is give the sport credibility through innovative marketing techniques. For Raskin, who specializes in secondary and tertiary markets, this has opened a lot of doors.

"Up to three years ago, so-called 'white collar' people were afraid to admit they liked professional wrestling. But if you talked to them, they'd know all of the (wrestlers') names — and they sure didn't get it by osmosis! But it wasn't fashionable then."

"Now it's much more open;

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THE MAIN EVENT — For Bob Raskin, all of his United States Wrestling Alliance bookings are main events. Raskin gathered some of his wrestlers following a show in Orwigsburg, Pa.: Misty Blue, front, and, from left, Pete Koury of a local volunteer ambulance department, Raskin, Capt. Lou Albano, Rocky Johnson and Afa, one of the Wild Samoans.

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AMUSEMENT BUSINESS

Attendance Jump At Adler Theatre Called 'Dramatic'

Attendance is picking up for RiverCenter, Davenport, Iowa. In its fourth year of operation, total attendance for events from July 1 to Dec. 31, 1987 was 144,000. That's compared to 174,000 visitors for the entire 1986-87 fiscal year.

The "dramatic increase" has delighted Dorothea Lischick, director of RiverCenter and 2,400-seat Adler Theatre.

"The theater is in its second year of operation. It's a 1930s RKO theater, restored by a local architect, and it was closed for five years, before re-opening two years ago. Now, you feel like Loretta Young walking through it."

"Things are picking up. The area is undergoing depression. Caterpillar closed and the Case company cut back."

"We've varied activities. 'Sesame Street Live,' scaled to theaters, opened here, and we had six performances with more than 12,000 people, from Sept. 17-20," she said.

A "festival of trees," held during Thanksgiving week, attracted 35,000 in its second year, up from 20,000. "There were more than 80 Christmas trees or settings."

The Quad City Times and Eagle Grocery sponsored a food show that drew more than 12,000 from

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SCALPING IS THE ISSUE — John Carey, left, South Bank Board, London, which runs the Royal Festival Hall, talks about scalping with James O'Neil, center, attorney, Ryley, Carlock & Applewhite, Phoenix, and Jim O'Connell, manager of facilities at Arizona State University, Tempe. The latter two were panelists during the Box Office Management International convention in Las Vegas. (AB Photo)

Differences In Statutes Make...

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sell 3,000 or 70,000 tickets. Volume is sold to cover the costs of the event. The scalper's only investment is the value of the ticket and creating an atmosphere that there is a ticket shortage. I don't believe we are underpricing."

The other myth "is that the ticket scalper is taking money out of the pocket of the talent or franchise. In effect, the scalper is buying some seats we wouldn't sell."

"The problem is the nature of

the ticket. Why can't a ticket be like a pair of jeans we can discount, like a stamp or coin with an inherent value? The reason is, the ticket is not the commodity; we are selling the rights to a service."

"People in the business of getting the best seats undermine the public confidence in us."

To combat that lack of confidence, some box office managers told of posting the seat manifest, color-coded to indicate which seats are allocated to whom.

Wrestling's Popularity Boosts Biz...

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wrestling is marketed in a different way and it makes sense, because what kind of business is sports? It's the entertainment business, and wrestling fits that to a T."

USWA events are held in venues seating from 1,500 up to 4,000. "More than 4,000 and in most cases we're deluding ourselves, unless it's a fair or outdoors in the summer," Raskin noted.

A small size has its advantages, one of them being flexibility. Small venues may be a specialty, but Raskin can and does promote events for large crowds — such as the 11,000 that showed up to watch an event held in London, Ont., two years ago.

FREQUENTLY SPONSORED

"USWA is also the only independent wrestling promotion I know of that does both co-promotions and sponsor participation packages," Raskin said.

In fact, his shows are almost always sponsored, usually by a non-profit group; sometimes, several charities get involved, and while this may cut the profits any one organization receives, it also ensures more tickets will be sold.

"It takes the burden off of participating organizations to sell tickets," Raskin pointed out.

The usual deal is that the sponsoring organization receives a cut of the gross and all food and drink proceeds, while Raskin keeps the merchandise gross. Although he said he'd rather get food and drink

profits, he acknowledges that it's best for this to be handled locally. "Also, that's where most non-profit organizations make most of their money."

Raskin's wrestlers may not have the drawing power of a Hulk Hogan, but they do a good job of entertaining audiences. Autograph sessions following a USWA event are standard, and Raskin also does what he can to arrange interviews and other promotional events before a show. Among the bigger names appearing on the USWA circuit are Sgt. Slaughter, Capt. Lou Albano, Misty Blue and the Wild Samoans.

In the sports world for two decades, Raskin nevertheless has an unusual business philosophy: "If I could, I would take all the knowledge I have, put it in a hat, and throw the hat away," he said.

However, he has observed some trends over the years. Merchandise spending, for example, has soared in recent years.

"My educated guess is that merchandise spending has doubled from 1985-87 over what it was from 1982-84. Wrestling is just more accepted by more people now, and more people are willing to purchase merchandise."

Can there be too much of a good thing? Following Wrestlemania III last March, which drew wrestling's largest indoor crowd ever at 93,173 (AB, April 11, 1987), Raskin said interest in wrestling seemed to cool. "They had pushed that event so much that when it was over, people didn't want to hear about wrestling anymore."

However, the decline was only temporary. Raskin promotes about 50 shows a year, of which about 12 percent are at fairs. A growing market for him is at racetracks, as halftime entertainment during ballgames, and after Major Indoor Soccer League events.

"At the racetrack," said Raskin, "people will get a wrestling show between races. When we did this at Philadelphia Park, I was told attendance rose 5,000 to 10,000 over what it normally would be."

Such is music to Raskin's ears. "USWA uses the best available talent, puts on an outstanding show and at a fair price," he said. "What we're striving to push is we're one of the best groups in terms of integrity."

Buffett & Sting Shows Set Marks At Patriot Ctr.

Records are made to be broken. That was the credo at the Patriot Center, Fairfax, Va., as Jimmy Buffett set a gross record, only to have it broken the next night by Sting.

Buffett and the Cheap Vacation Band sold out the venue with an attendance record of 10,204, Jan. 29, for a gross of \$188,596 in a show promoted by Musicentre Productions. That figure broke the previous high of \$177,550 at the Centre Management-operated building set by Kenny Rogers in May 1986.

Before Buffett could down a congratulatory margarita, Sting came in the following evening and drew a sellout crowd of 10,044 for a gross of \$195,616. That show was promoted by I.M.P. Productions.

The weekend concluded a busy January for the building, located on the campus of George Mason University.

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